

Seeking attention versus seeking approval: How conspicuous consumption differs between grandiose and vulnerable narcissists

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Abstract

Narcissism, a personality trait characterized by entitlement and conceit, is increasingly prevalent in society. Two subtypes of narcissism exist: grandiose narcissism (characterized by arrogance and dominance) and vulnerable narcissism (characterized by social insecurity and overreliance on others' feedback). We posit that both narcissistic subtypes will engage in ostentatious, showy purchases, that is, conspicuous consumption. Since the two subtypes differ so profoundly in their self-esteem regulation strategies, we further posit that their motivations to consume conspicuously may vary. Specifically, we hypothesize that grandiose narcissists' conspicuous consumption will be driven by their need-for-uniqueness, whilst that of vulnerable narcissists by their need to avoid social disapproval. We test our hypotheses using data obtained from 382 participants. Our results support our expectations that both narcissism subtypes predict conspicuous consumption and that the relationship between grandiose narcissism and conspicuous consumption is mediated by their need-for-uniqueness. Meanwhile, we find that approval-seeking (AS) is only a marginally significant mediator of vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption in females. We discuss theoretical and managerial implications.

KEYWORDS

approval-seeking, conspicuous consumption, grandiose narcissism, need for uniqueness, vulnerable narcissism

1 | INTRODUCTION

Narcissism, the individual tendency towards an "objectively unjustified conceit" (Lee, Gregg, & Park, 2013, p. 336), is considered a "modern epidemic" (Remes, 2016). Between 1982 and 2006, narcissism scores rose substantially in the USA (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008) and this trend has also been observed in other countries such as China (Cai, Kwan, & Sedikides, 2012). The rise in narcissism is thought to be fueled by the internet, as narcissism is associated with, for

example, Facebook usage (Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013) and selfie-posting behaviors (Weiser, 2015). Subclinical or nonpathological narcissism, as a consumer disposition, is distinct from pathological narcissism, a personality disorder that leads to individuals experiencing impairments in personality and interpersonal function (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This study focuses on narcissism as a nonpathological individual trait that consumers exhibit to a higher or lower degree (Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007) and on its impact on conspicuous consumption. Narcissism is an important consumer disposition for luxury goods marketers because people scoring high in subclinical narcissism (henceforth referred to as "narcissists" for brevity) show higher levels of

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materialism and an enhanced desire for expensive products (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Understanding the consumer behavioral consequences of narcissism is important especially for luxury goods marketers. Narcissism is particularly prevalent among younger generations, such as millennial and generation Z consumers (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Vanian, 2017), that is, consumers who, by 2025, are projected to account for 45% of the global personal luxury goods market (Solomon, 2017).

Narcissists may be prone to conspicuous consumption as they seek products that help them enhance their self-worth and self-importance. Research suggests that narcissists may prefer products that are expensive, exclusive, new, and flashy, such as luxury products (Sedikides et al., 2007). Narcissists are prime targets for luxury brand marketers as they use luxury products to draw attention to themselves and display their superiority (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Research has found a positive association between narcissism and impulsive buying tendencies (Rose, 2007) as well as preference towards branded goods of public consumption (Pilch & Górnik-Durose, 2017). However, to our knowledge research is still to test for an association between narcissism and conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption should be particularly relevant to narcissistic consumers as it is a self-focused, showy behavior (Lee & Shrum, 2012) intended to impress others as well as to augment one's power over them (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Further, and given that narcissism is not a monolithic disposition, it is unclear what underlying mechanisms may explain the potential relationships between the two different narcissistic subtypes, grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Miller et al., 2018), and conspicuous consumption. All narcissists are self-absorbed and arrogant (Wink, 1991). However, grandiose narcissists are extraverted, exhibitionistic, self-assured, aggressive, and dominant, whereas vulnerable narcissists show high levels of introversion, anxiety, and defensiveness (Miller et al., 2011). Recently, researchers have started to examine the importance of these two narcissistic subtypes as luxury brand targets (Fastoso, Bartikowski, & Wang, 2018; Kang & Park, 2016; Lambert & Desmond, 2013). This study adds to that incipient body of research.

In this study, we advance on knowledge of the consumer behavior of grandiose versus vulnerable narcissists by testing the underlying mechanisms of the relationships between each narcissism subtype and conspicuous consumption. We draw on approach-avoidance motivation theory (Elliot, 1999) to posit that, as grandiose narcissists tend to be approach motivated (Foster & Trimm, 2008), consumers' need-for-uniqueness—that is, the need in consumers to establish their dissimilarity from others through consumption choices (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001)—will mediate the relationship between grandiose narcissism and conspicuous consumption. Meanwhile, as vulnerable narcissists tend to be avoidance motivated (Foster & Trimm, 2008), we posit that approval-seeking (AS)—that is, the human need for social approval (Martin, 1984)—will mediate the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption. Understanding how grandiose and vulnerable narcissists engage in conspicuous consumption is of theoretical and managerial relevance because most narcissism research is focused on the grandiose subtype (Cisek et al., 2014). The growing attention on vulnerable narcissism in both the psychology (e.g., Miller et al., 2018) and marketing literature (e.g., Fastoso et al., 2018) is justified by the fact

that the vulnerable narcissism subtype may be the more prevalent form of narcissism among younger generations such as millennials. For instance, in the same way that vulnerable narcissists are dependent on obtaining approval from others to regulate their relatively global, contingent self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill, Clark, & Pickard, 2008), millennials strive for appreciation as they are used to others' feedback arriving within seconds of their social media postings (Sturt, 2017).

2 | THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Narcissists strive to make themselves look and feel positive, special, successful, and important, and they do so through a vast array of self-regulatory strategies such as bragging, displaying material goods, and socializing with important individuals (Campbell & Foster, 2007). The consumption of high prestige products, such as luxury, enables narcissists to express their elevated self-views (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000) by increasing their apparent status and eliciting others' envy (Sedikides et al., 2007). However, recent research suggests that narcissistic luxury consumption may differ by narcissism subtype, i.e., grandiose vs. vulnerable narcissism (Kang & Park, 2016). Grandiose narcissism is characterized by arrogance and dominance, whereas vulnerable narcissism reflects social insecurity and negative affect (Miller, Gentile, Wilson, & Campbell, 2013). Grandiose narcissism relates positively to self-esteem (Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991) and extraversion (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002) but negatively to neuroticism (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2008). Vulnerable narcissism relates positively to introversion (Campbell & Miller, 2013) and neuroticism (Hendin & Cheek, 1997) but negatively to self-esteem (Rose, 2002). Although higher self-esteem is reported in grandiose over vulnerable narcissists (Rose, 2002), such self-esteem is typically fragile (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Both narcissistic subtypes show high social comparison tendencies (Krizan & Bushman, 2011) and thus need to implement suitable strategies to maintain their extremely positive self-views (Bosson et al., 2008). While most research into narcissism only considers its grandiose subtype, recent research examining the consumer behavioral consequences of these two subtypes has shown some differences between the two. For instance, Lambert and Desmond (2013) suggest that vulnerable narcissists' underlying fragility may lead them to choose from a broad portfolio of brands, whereas the grandiose sense of self in grandiose narcissists may lead them to choose from a more limited yet robust set of brands reflecting that self. Further, Fastoso et al. (2018) find that vulnerable narcissists are more prone to buying counterfeits than grandiose narcissists, possibly because of an urge in vulnerable narcissists to self-aggrandize at lower monetary costs to mask the underlying fragility of their self.

2.1 | Main effects of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism on conspicuous consumption

Research suggests that narcissists may engage in conspicuous consumption to boost their status, self-protect, or derive self-

esteem from the responses of admiring others (Cisek et al., 2014). The notion of conspicuous consumption goes back to the Theory of the Leisure Class (Veblen, 1899), which posits that it is not the accumulation of wealth that confers status to a person but its wasteful exhibition (i.e., “conspicuous consumption”). For instance, luxury consumption is seen as conspicuous, as one of its main purposes is to enhance prestige and inflate the ego of the luxury owner through the ostentatious display of wealth (O’cass & Frost, 2002). Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981) posits that the more uncertain a person’s self-concept is, the stronger their materialistic tendencies. Individuals seek to acquire symbols, such as brands, strongly related to what they perceive as their idealized self, and they seek ownership of high-status goods especially when their self is under threat (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). Evidence linking materialism to conspicuous consumption (Velov, Gojkovic, & Djuric, 2014) suggests that conspicuous consumption may be particularly prevalent in people with an unstable self-concept. Given their fragile self-esteem (Morf, & Rhodewalt, 2001) and continuous need for confirmation of their unrealistically high self-views (Bosson et al., 2008), narcissists may adopt conspicuous consumption as a self-enhancement strategy. To our knowledge, the link between narcissistic subtypes and conspicuous consumption is yet to be studied. However, related evidence showing that both narcissism subtypes predict preference towards nonluxury branded goods of public consumption including cars, clothes, detergents, sweets and electronics (Pilch & Górník-Durose, 2017) suggests a positive association between both narcissism subtypes and conspicuous consumption. Hence, we posit that:

H1: *Grandiose narcissism positively predicts conspicuous consumption.*

H2: *Vulnerable narcissism positively predicts conspicuous consumption.*

2.2 | Mediation effects

We further consider underlying mechanisms explaining our main relationships (see Figure 1). While our first two hypotheses expect narcissists of both subtypes to engage in conspicuous consumption, our next two expect each effect to be mediated by different psychological mechanisms. To posit these effects, we draw on approach-avoidance motivation theory (Elliot, 1999), which presents approach and avoidance motivations as two theoretically orthogonal motivations of human behavior (Foster & Trimm, 2008). The behavior of those with an approach-motivation is driven by desirable outcomes, whereas that of people with an avoidance-motivation is driven by the prevention of undesirable outcomes (Elliot & Thrash,

2002). In a meta-analysis, Foster and Trimm (2008) find that grandiose narcissism predicts high approach-motivation and low avoidance-motivation, whereas vulnerable narcissism predicts high avoidance-motivation.

Grandiose narcissists may engage in conspicuous consumption to gain uniqueness. Grandiose narcissists are interested in gaining attention and admiration from others to self-aggrandize (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Cisek et al. (2014) argue that grandiose narcissists may validate their grandiose self-image by conspicuously consuming to gain the reward of distinguishing themselves from others. Gaining status is a key motivation of narcissistic behavior (Horton & Sedikides, 2009) and research shows that people high (vs. low) in grandiose narcissism are more likely to purchase scarce products (Lee & Seidle, 2012) as well as products promoting uniqueness (Lee et al., 2013). Therefore, we expect a positive association between grandiose narcissism and consumer need-for-uniqueness, that is, the need in consumers to establish their dissimilarity from others through the products they consume (Ruvio, Shoham, & Makovec Brenčič, 2008). Further, consumer need-for-uniqueness may be associated with conspicuous consumption as evidence suggests that it drives “snobbish” luxury consumption (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014), that is, luxury consumption focused on creating a sense of differentiation from other luxury consumers (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). Thus, we propose that:

H3: *Need-for-uniqueness mediates the relationship between grandiose narcissism and conspicuous consumption.*

Meanwhile, vulnerable narcissists may engage in conspicuous consumption to obtain approval from others. Threats to self-esteem are likely to motivate approval-seeking behaviors (Leary & Downs, 1995). Compared with grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists show lower levels of self-esteem (Miller et al., 2011) and they rely heavily on others’ evaluations to regulate that self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2008). Therefore, vulnerable narcissism may be positively related to approval seeking, that is, the human need for social approval (Martin, 1984). Further, approval seeking may be positively related to conspicuous consumption, as research shows that social influence, that is, the changing of behavior to meet the demands of the social environment, is strongly correlated with luxury brand purchase intention (Zhan & He, 2012). In addition, Tsai (2005) suggests that consumers who have a social, rather than a personal, orientation to luxury brand consumption are motivated to possess luxury brands to display their status to peers. Thus, vulnerable narcissists may engage in conspicuous consumption to seek others’ approval. They may seek such approval for fear of negative social evaluation, that is, as a way to avoid social disapproval, as research shows that fear of negative social evaluation mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and the power-prestige money attitude (i.e., the use of money to dominate others), a characteristic behavior of conspicuous consumption (Ng, Tam, & Shu, 2011). Hence:

H4: *Approval-seeking mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption.*

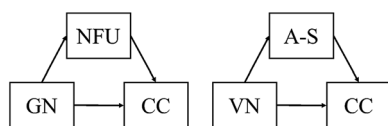


FIGURE 1 Proposed models of the relationships between the narcissism variables and conspicuous consumption

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Measurement

An online survey of 382 participants was used to gather data to test our hypotheses. The survey was carried out in the United Kingdom, an important market for luxury goods producers, worth €17 billion in 2017, and ranking 5th in the world for market size (Bain & Company, 2017). The survey included previously validated measures for our focal constructs adopted from the literature. We measured grandiose narcissism (GN) using the 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16; Ames, Rose & Anderson, 2006). This forced-choice scale asks respondents to choose the closest description of their personality from 16 pairs of statements reflecting narcissistic (coded as "1"), e.g., "I like to be the centre of attention", versus non-narcissistic behaviour (coded as "0"), e.g., "I prefer to blend in with the crowd". Further, we measured vulnerable narcissism (VN) using the 10-item Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997), which includes items such as, "I often interpret the remarks of others in a personal way" or "I dislike sharing the credit of an achievement with others". We measured consumer need-for-uniqueness (CNFU) using the 12-item Short-form Scale by Ruvio et al. (2008), which captures three conceptually related dimensions of CNFU. The creative choice dimension measures an individuals' ability to use products in creating personal styles (e.g., 'I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands'). The unpopular choice dimension measures consumers' product use deviating from social norms (e.g., 'I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own'). The avoidance of similarity dimension measures the effort to avoid using widely adopted products (e.g., 'As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone'). Finally, we measured approval-seeking using the 20-item Revised Martin-Larsen Approval Motivation Scale (MLAM; Martin, 1984), which includes items such as 'I am willing to argue only if I know that my friends will back me up'. Finally, we measured conspicuous consumption (CC) using the 11-item Conspicuous Consumption Orientation scale (Roy Chaudhuri, Mazumdar, & Ghoshal, 2011), which includes items such as "I always buy top-of-the-line products". For all measures except the NPI-16, agreement was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Following the literature, GN scores were obtained by creating an average of scores per item pair, while scores for all other constructs were calculated by summing individual item scores per construct.

3.2 | Participants

Five hundred and eleven participants were recruited through non-probability convenience sampling including snowball sampling methods (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). One hundred and twenty two partially completed questionnaires were excluded from further

consideration. Following univariate outlier analysis, we eliminated seven data sets where z scores fell outside of the ± 3.29 boundaries (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). No multivariate outliers were established, thus leaving $N = 382$ data sets for data analysis. Approximately 57% of respondents in the final sample were aged 16–25, 78% were female, 47.1% were students, and 43.2% were employed/self-employed (Table 1).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Preliminary analyses and descriptive statistics

Data was analyzed in SPSS (Version 24.0). Table 2 shows means and standard deviations for all measures employed, alongside correlations between all constructs. Reliability estimates are above or just below the .7 level, in support of the internal consistency and convergent validity of our measures (Hair et al., 2006). Bivariate correlations suggest that the measures employed discriminate reasonably well from one another, as that only theoretically similar constructs are moderately correlated, such as CC and CNFU ($r = .489$). The correlations between theoretically dissimilar constructs were significantly lower. The correlation between VN and GN of $r = .105$ is in line with previous studies (Cai et al., 2012; Hendin & Cheek, 1997).

4.2 | Effects of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism on conspicuous consumption

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using simple regressions in SPSS. Results indicate that GN explains a significant portion of the variance of CC ($R^2 = 0.11$; $F(1,380) = 47.704$, $p < .001$) and that GN positively predicts CC ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$), in support of H1. Results also indicate that VN explains a significant portion of the variance of CC ($R^2 = 0.05$; $F(1,380) = 21.143$, $p < .001$) and that VN positively predicts CC ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$), in support of H2.

TABLE 1 Sample distribution by demographic criteria

Demographic frequencies (%)	
Age (years)	
16–25	56.5
26–35	11.0
36–45	15.7
46+	16.8
Gender	
Male	20.9
Female	78.0
Prefer not to say	1.1
Employment	
Employed/self-employed	43.2
Student	47.1
Out of work	5.8
Retired	3.9

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics, correlations and Cronbach's α

	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's α	NPI-16	HSNS	CNFU-S	MLAM
NPI-16	0.41	.24	.78				
HSNS	28.91	4.98	.68	0.105*			
CNFU	31.83	7.79	.87	0.263**	0.222**		
MLAM	26.93	5.48	.74	-0.245**	0.364**	-0.88	
CC	25.35	7.16	.86	0.334**	0.230**	0.489**	0.112*

Abbreviations: CC, conspicuous consumption orientation; CNFU, consumer need for uniqueness; HSNS, Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale; MLAM, Martin-Larsen Approval Motivation Scale.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

4.3 | Mediation effects

Hypotheses 3 and 4 were tested using Baron and Kenny's (1986) method. According to it, mediation is satisfied when (1) the predictor variable significantly predicts the outcome variable; (2) the mediating variable significantly predicts the outcome variable; (3) the predictor variable significantly predicts the mediating variable; and (4) the predictor variable no longer significantly predicts the outcome variable when both the predictor and mediator variables are entered into the regression. Hypothesis 3 expected CNFU to mediate the effect of GN on CC. As can be seen in Figure 2, three simple regressions established all three paths in the model (Figure 2), in support of the first three conditions of mediation. Specifically, GN significantly predicted CC ($\beta = .334$; $p < .001$), CNFU significantly predicted CC ($\beta = .489$; $p < .001$), and GN significantly predicted CNFU ($\beta = .256$; $p < .001$). A multiple regression with GN and CNFU predicting CC was used to test the fourth condition. Results show a significant model overall [$R^2 = .295$; $F(2,379) = 79.388$, $p < .001$]. Both GN ($\beta = .245$; $p < .001$) and CNFU ($\beta = .426$; $p < .001$) positively predict CC. These results suggested the possibility of partial mediation, which was confirmed with the Sobel Test ($S = 4.541$, $SE = 0.922$, $p < .001$). Results thus support H3.

Hypothesis 4 expected approval-seeking to mediate the effect of VN on CC. As can be seen in Figure 3, three simple regressions established all three paths in the model (Figure 3), in support of the first three conditions of mediation. Specifically, VN significantly predicted CC ($\beta = .230$; $p < .001$), AS significantly predicted CC ($\beta = .112$; $p < .05$), and

VN significantly predicted AS ($\beta = .364$; $p < .001$). A multiple regression with VN and AS predicting CC was used to test the fourth condition. Results show a significant model overall [$R^2 = 0.05$; $F(2,379) = 10.74$, $p < .001$]. VN significantly predicts CC ($\beta = .218$; $p < .001$) but AS does not ($\beta = .032$, ns). Thus, results fail to support H4.

Finally, to shed light on the results on H4 we ran separate analyses for males and females. This decision was driven by the fact that males tend to report higher levels of conspicuous consumption than females (O'cass & McEwen, 2004). Results fail to support H4 for the male group, as neither VN nor AS significantly predict CC. However, results from the female sample show significant bivariate relationships between all three variables. Specifically, VN significantly predicts CC ($\beta = .253$, $p < .001$), VN significantly predicts AS ($\beta = .349$, $p < .001$), and AS significantly predicts CC ($\beta = .182$, $p < .01$). Further, a multiple regression of VN and AS on CC showed that VN remained a significant predictor of CC ($\beta = .216$, $p < .001$), whilst AS marginally predicted CC ($\beta = .106$, $p < .1$).

5 | DISCUSSION

5.1 | Theoretical implications

Our findings support the proposed main effects of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism on conspicuous consumption, thus confirming the relevance of consumers of both narcissistic subtypes as prime targets for luxury goods producers (Fastoso et al., 2018; Kang & Park, 2016; Lambert & Desmond, 2013). Our findings show that both subtypes

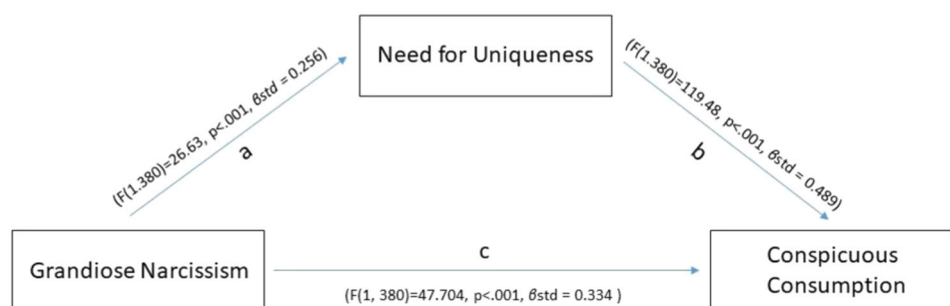


FIGURE 2 The mediating role of consumer need for uniqueness in the relationship between GN and CC, along with the simple regression findings

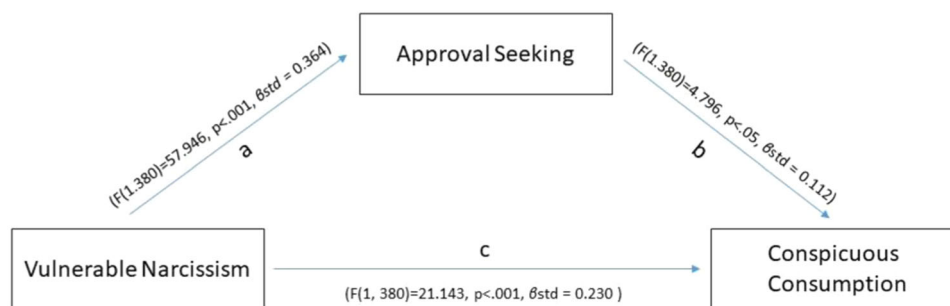


FIGURE 3 The mediating role of approval-seeking in the relationship between VN and CC, along with the simple regression findings

engage in conspicuous consumption, that is, a self-focused, showy behavior (Lee & Shrum, 2012) intended to impress others (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Thus, they lend support to earlier suggestions that narcissists of both subtypes flaunt their material possessions to maintain their highly positive self-views (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Kang & Park, 2016). Finally, our findings contribute to knowledge of antecedents of conspicuous consumption. Recent research had shown that people with an independent self-construal, that is, those characterized by higher autonomy and egocentrism (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), were more likely to engage in the consumption of “snobbish” luxury (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). Our findings further that knowledge by showing a similar pattern for grandiose narcissistic consumers, i.e., consumers who tend to have an independent self-construal (Rohmann, Neumann, Herner, & Bierhoff, 2012) and a strong self-orientation (Campbell, 1999).

Our findings further support our expectation that consumer need-for-uniqueness mediates the relationship between grandiose narcissism and conspicuous consumption. Thus, they lend empirical support to the notion that grandiose narcissists seek to differentiate themselves from others by consuming conspicuously (Cisek et al., 2014). Need-for-uniqueness theory posits that all individuals crave uniqueness to some extent (Tian et al., 2001). People low on need-for-uniqueness desire to be “just like everybody else” while people high on need-for-uniqueness want to be as different and distinct from others as possible (Ruvio et al., 2008). One way to express uniqueness is the selection of suitable products and brands, given that possessions are often perceived as part of the extended self (Belk, 1988). Our findings support the notion that grandiose narcissists purchase luxury goods to communicate a distinctive self-image to others by projecting a special and colorful lifestyle (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007) intended to attract others' attention and elicit positive feedback (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Marshall, Lefringhausen, & Ferenczi, 2015).

Finally, our findings do not support our expectation that approval-seeking would mediate the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption. We based our expectation on work by Ng et al. (2011), who found that vulnerable narcissists strive to possess money and expensive items for fear of negative comments made by others about them. We argued that approval-seeking, a trait akin to fear of negative social evaluation, should mediate the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption. We found no support for this expectation.

Our findings may be explained by the fact that approval-seeking differs from fear of negative social evaluation in that it manifests itself in behavior which actively seeks approval rather than behavior that is driven by the motivation to avoid disapproval. Hence, as vulnerable narcissists are avoidance-motivated (Foster & Trim, 2008), and hypersensitive to social evaluation and fear negative comments (Hendin & Cheek, 1997), they may consume conspicuously to avoid disapproval rather than to seek approval. Despite our lack of support for our final expectation, additional regression analyses revealed different mediational effects of approval-seeking on the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption for males versus females. Although the mediation effect of approval-seeking on the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption was nonsignificant in our total sample, as well as in the male subsample, it reached marginal significance in the female subsample. This finding is in line with research showing that women have more positive attitudes toward and higher purchase intentions of luxury brands than men and that for female consumers, luxury brands provide more uniqueness, status and hedonic value than nonluxury brands (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013). The reason for such differing findings may relate to higher approval-seeking tendencies (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2008) as well as higher avoidance-motivation tendencies (Elliot & Thrash, 2002) in females over males.

5.2 | Managerial implications

The results of this study present interesting implications for luxury brand marketers. Our findings suggest that both narcissistic subtypes consume conspicuously, yet do so for different reasons. Grandiose narcissists engage in conspicuous consumption to establish their dissimilarity from others (i.e., their uniqueness) and female vulnerable narcissists do so to obtain the approval from others. Therefore, as brand communications are designed to target consumers of specific personality traits (Hirsh, Kang, & Bodenhausen, 2012), our findings suggest that the two types of narcissistic consumers should be targeted by differently, for instance by using differently framed messages. Message framing involves manipulating the way in which information is presented to consumers to optimize its impact on the receivers' reactions and behavior (Rothman & Salovey, 1997). In the

luxury arena, message framing generally involves communicating the product's scarcity (Catry, 2003). Communications of scarcity can include messages emphasizing either "demand scarcity," where scarcity arises as consumer demand outstrips supply, or "supply-generated scarcity," where scarcity results from vendors' limitation of available items (Gierl & Huettl, 2010). Our findings suggest that when targeting grandiose vs. vulnerable narcissists, marketers may benefit from communicating scarcity in a different manner (Figure 4). Grandiose narcissists may respond more positively to scarcity attributed to shortfalls in supply, as research shows that those who are approach-motivated (Ku, Kuo, & Kuo, 2012), as well as those with high need-for-uniqueness levels (Roy & Sharma, 2015), prefer products communicated through a supply-generated scarcity appeal. Conversely, female vulnerable narcissists may respond more positively to demand scarcity, as research shows that avoidance-motivated consumers adopt products that they perceive as demand-scarce (Ku et al., 2012). Further, as approval-seeking tendencies mediate the effect of vulnerable narcissism on conspicuous consumption (at least in females), it is likely that demand scarcity appeals will work better with such narcissists due to their fear of missing out on a popular product (cf. Kang & Park, 2016).

To turn the implications of this study into practice luxury goods marketers need to be able to distinguish grandiose from vulnerable narcissistic targets. While marketers can measure narcissism directly, as we do in this study, personality traits such as narcissism can also be inferred from behavior on social media platforms such as Facebook (Matz, Kosinski, Nave, & Stillwell, 2017). For instance, research on social media shows that vulnerable narcissists report higher preference for online social interactions, whereas grandiose narcissists spend more time visiting their own profile page (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008), and posting more pictures of themselves (McCain & Campbell, 2016). They also use more profane and aggressive language (DeWall, Buffardi, Bonser, & Campbell, 2011). Moreover, people high in grandiose narcissism receive larger numbers of "dislikes" on Facebook, whereas those high in vulnerable narcissism are less actively disliked, but receive fewer "likes" (Czarna, Dufner, & Clifton, 2014). Further, a study by Bai, Zhu, and Cheng (2012) shows that the Big-Five Personality traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and openness) can be predicted from a user's social networking activity with reasonable precision. They find that status republishing is related to extraversion, a characteristic of grandiose narcissism, and angry blogging to neuroticism, a characteristic of vulnerable narcissism (cf. Miller et al., 2011). Thus, luxury marketers could follow this approach to determine which

narcissistic subtype their targets come closest to based on their social media activity.

6 | LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has limitations that point at interesting avenues for future research. First, perhaps the most apparent limitation is that just under half of our respondents were university students, that is, people with a lower disposable income than the national (UK) population (Lipsett, 2018; Trading Economics, 2018). While students have less disposable income to consume conspicuously, they are also attractive targets for luxury brands as, by 2025, 45% of the global personal luxury goods market is projected to be accounted for by millennials and generation Z (Solomon, 2017). Second, like all correlational studies, this study cannot establish causality between our focal constructs. Therefore, future research should replicate our work using experimental designs to manipulate state narcissism (cf. De Bellis, Sprott, Herrmann, Bierhoff, & Rohmann, 2016). Further, our findings in support of a marginally significant mediation of approval-seeking in the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption for females suggests that more research is needed to shed light onto the psychological mechanisms explaining that relationship. Materialism, the importance that people attach to worldly possessions (Belk, 1985), deserves attention in this context, as it predicts conspicuous consumption (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012), and positively correlates with neuroticism (Mick, 1996), as does vulnerable narcissism (Hendin & Cheek, 1997). Finally, future research could test our suggestions that advertising communicating demand scarcity should be more effective for vulnerable narcissists, and advertisements communicating supply-generated scarcity be more effective for grandiose narcissists.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of conspicuous consumption in grandiose and vulnerable narcissists. Using approach-avoidance motivations theory as a frame, this study tests the relationships between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism with conspicuous consumption as well as different underlying mechanisms for each relationship. It finds that both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism predict conspicuous consumption with reasonable percentages of the variance explained. Further, findings show that consumer need-for-uniqueness mediates the relationship between grandiose narcissism and conspicuous consumption, while approval-seeking marginally significantly mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and conspicuous consumption for females. Overall, the motivational differences behind the conspicuous consumption of the two narcissistic subtypes suggested by our findings highlight the importance for luxury goods marketers of identifying the narcissistic profile of their targets to better address their differing needs.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

(a) This designer watch is a limited edition; available for one month only!

(b) This designer watch is so popular; hurry while stocks last!

FIGURE 4 Examples of marketing communications for a luxury watch with "supply-generated scarcity" (a) and "demand scarcity" (b)

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